

COUNTY EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR HONORED FOR BUILDING SUCCESSFUL RECYCLING PROGRAM, AND OTHER “GREEN” INITIATIVES

For more than a decade, Catawba County Government has focused strongly on environmental policies, which have become known as “green initiatives”. The County’s EcoComplex, which is enjoying national recognition, is one example of this focus. Catawba County’s second place ranking in the amount of materials recycled, per person, among all North Carolina counties is another.

These policies and practices don’t just fall into place. They are directed by the Catawba County Board of Commissioners and put in place by dedicated staff. A County employee who has been very instrumental in the County’s focus on “green” programs, and especially its successful recycling program, has been named Catawba County’s 2009 Employee Of The Year.



Amanda Kain, Catawba County’s Waste Reduction Coordinator and Educator, was named Employee Of The Year during the County’s annual Awards Night dinner on October 20. Kain, who has worked for the County for almost twenty years, was selected for the honor by the County’s Employee Committee, made up of staff representing each of the County’s sixteen departments.

“Amanda is responsible for improving waste reduction, reuse, and recycling through waste reduction and recycling education to the industrial and commercial community, as well as the citizens of Catawba County,” said Brandy Watts, an Administrative Assistant with the Catawba County Department of Utilities and Engineering, who nominated Kain for the honor. “She has educated the public on all aspects of the Utilities and Engineering Department through presentations, tours, hands-on models and more. She oversees the County’s Waste Education Program and conducts tours on all aspects of the Utilities and Engineering Department: Waste Reduction and Recycling, Landfill Operations, and Building Services.”

Kain is a member of Keep Catawba County Beautiful and represents Catawba County as a liaison to the City of Hickory’s Recycling Advisory Board. She is certified by the North Carolina Chapter of the Solid Waste Association of North America (NC SWANA) as a Recycling Systems Manager. Kain is also a member of the NC SWANA Waste Reduction and Recycling Committee. She represents the Town of Maiden on the Catawba County Library Board and is a member of Maiden’s Yard Of The Month Committee.

“Amanda is an employee who never hesitates to go the extra mile to serve customers, citizens, and coworkers regardless of the work area,” Watts added. “She is an excellent steward of County resources, the environment, and educational issues. She has worked diligently to enhance and improve programs associated with her department and Catawba County, which has resulted in Catawba County receiving a high ranking among North Carolina counties, moving from 5th place to 2nd place in recycled tonnage, per capita. Responsible for the management of household hazardous waste and electronic waste, Amanda has helped provide a cleaner environment for Catawba County.”

Amanda’s enthusiasm and dedication are second to none,” Watts concluded. “She is always ready to take on any new projects that come her way. She is willing for work boundaries to be very flexible, and adapts to changes with ease and commitment. Her cheerful attitude during a recent renovation of our department, and through changes in receptionists, reflects the positive outlook that Amanda displays. There is always a helpful side of Amanda. If she does not know an answer to a question, she will find someone who may be of assistance. She has provided 19 years of enduring and dedicated service to Catawba County.”

A native of Maiden, NC, Kain graduated from Maiden High School and then earned an Associate's Degree in Business Administration from Catawba Valley Community College. She began working for Catawba County as a clerk in the Tax Office in January 1990. She moved to the Buildings Inspections Division, as a Code Enforcement Technician, in July 1995. That division comes under the Department of Utilities and Engineering within the County's organization, and Kain was promoted to work in that department's administrative office in July 2002 as an Administrative Assistant. She was named Waste Reduction Coordinator/Educator on February 5, 2004.

Prior to working for Catawba County, Kain held several jobs with Citizens Savings Bank of Newton, including service as a Finance Clerk and as a Loan Servicing Representative. She is married to Greg Kain, an Environmental Health Specialist with Catawba County Public Health. They live in Maiden and have two sons: Spencer and Max.

"Amanda is the ideal public servant, employee, team member, and friend," said Barry Edwards, Catawba County Utilities and Engineering Director. "She is driven by every opportunity to improve our environment, others, and herself; and willingly works all hours of the day and week to improve our community. Amanda is dependable, honest, and she always casts a magnetic, positive and proactive attitude in her work that compels others to follow her example."

Thirteen Catawba County employees were nominated for the Employee of the Year honor for 2009. Other nominees included: Judy Baxter, Accounting Specialist III, Public Health; Michelle Deese, GIS Administrator, Geospatial Information Systems; Ernie Hall, Licensed Practical Nurse, Public Health; Penny Hunsucker, Nurse Practitioner, Public Health; Cee Lee, Human Resources Technician, Human Resources; Bill Little, Tax Assessor, Tax; Trudy Logan, Prevention Unit Supervisor, Social Services; Adrena Phillips, CNA II, Public Health; Bill Rogers, Plan Review Official, Utilities and Engineering; Tammy Saunders, Acting Supervisor, Communications Center; Janine Szymanski, Clinical Program Manager, Social Services; and Sylvia Yates, STD Charge Nurse II, Public Health

Another highlight of the evening was the presentation of the 2009 Team Award. "We began giving Team Awards in 1994 to honor groups of employees whose combined efforts improve County services," said County Manager Tom Lundy, who served as Master of Ceremonies for the County's Awards Night. "We have always appreciated the value of work done by groups of employees who focus their energies on a common goal."

A panel of judges in the government field, independent of Catawba County, selected the Team Award winner for 2009. They selected the Leadership Team for Child Welfare Reorganization, comprised of employees of Catawba County Social Services.



Front row, left to right: Elizabeth Clore, Hyggens Dormus. Back row, left to right: Jason Hughes, Sherry Stepp, April Greenhill, Katherine Turk, Linda Smith and Jennifer Miller. All are Child Welfare Supervisors with Catawba County Social Services. Not pictured: Cyndy Benson and Amy Herman, Team Leaders

"Recognizing the complex needs of families involved with child welfare, in summer 2009, child welfare managers and supervisors stepped up to launch an organizational redesign to assure more seamless services for families in need," said Assistant Social Services Director, Beth Brandes, who nominated the team for the award. "They decided to 'practice what they preached' about partnerships—and acknowledged that child welfare could be more effective with families if units partnered differently. With input from staff and families, they proposed a new organizational structure with eight 'Blended Workgroup Teams' and then launched this effort in September 2009."

The "Blended Teams" include Child Protective Services investigative assessors, in-home social workers and Foster Care social workers with strong links to Therapeutic Foster Care, Family

Builders, and Family Preservation. Families experience fewer transitions between staff, and staff obtain more comprehensive information about families from the outset.

“Now, two Social Work Supervisors co-facilitate four teams each of child protective services investigators, in-home social workers and foster care social workers,” Brandes said. “The team reviews a family’s strengths and needs weekly, and with input from core ‘linked staff’, determine and coordinate more comprehensive plans for families. The teams re-visit statutory and programmatic policy and procedure to assure continuity across all child welfare teams.”

The benefits of the Blended Teams include uninterrupted services throughout a child and family’s involvement in child welfare services; improved transitions as a family moves from the initial assessment, to in-home services, to out-of-home placement so that the safety, well being and stability/permanency of children is assured; and involvement of all team members so that we have more input from various perspectives to enhance our problem-solving, decision-making capacity,” Brandes concluded.

The members of the Leadership Team for Child Welfare Reorganization include: Cyndy Benson, Child Protective Services Program Manager and Amy Herman, Permanency Program Manager, who led the team; and April Greenhill, Sherry Stepp, Katherine Turk, Jason Hughes, Jennifer Miller, Hygens Dormus, Linda Smith and Elizabeth Clore, all Child Welfare Supervisors with Catawba County Social Services.

Seven other teams of County employees were nominated for Catawba County Team Awards. They are an Electronic Medical Records Team; the Fleet and Facility Maintenance staff; Residential/Family NET Summer Program Team; School Nurse Alternate Schedule Project Team; St Stephens Park Project Team; Summer Youth Environmental Education Team; and Catawba County WIC Team.

Awards Night was also a time to recognize other County employees who were honored professionally during the past year.

The Reports, Outcomes and Services (ROCs) Team from Social Services, which won a Team Award in 2008, was recognized again for winning a 2009 National Association of Counties Achievement Award. This team created a streamlined data compilation system to meet challenging new State requirements for the documenting of child protective services cases, designing a master application document, which could be connected to future development efforts, that consolidated the State’s new documentation requirements and five other existing applications the agency had been using.

More than 80 employees, teams and departments were recognized for varying degrees earned, awards won and accomplishments of the past year. County staff who participated in contests based on taking steps to reduce ozone and other air pollutants were honored, as were those contributing to and participating in the County’s annual United Way campaign.

Eighteen employees who have retired in the past year were saluted, along with County employees who have served for five, ten, fifteen, twenty, twenty-five, thirty and thirty-five years. Four current or retired County employees who have passed away in the last year were remembered. These included Winnie Detter, a retiree of the Tax Department; Barbara Fracaro, a retiree of Public Health; John Nixon, who worked for Catawba County Emergency Services; and Ruth Mackie, retired Register of Deeds.

"Our Employee Awards night is one of the most important events we have each year," Lundy said. "The high quality of services delivered to our citizens is a reflection of the fine work done by our employees. It is always a privilege for members of the Board of Commissioners and me to spend an evening recognizing many of our employees for outstanding work, and thanking each and every one for the part they play in helping make Catawba County a great place in which to live and work."